

The Brooks County Board of Commissioners met for a Public Hearing and Regular Monthly Meeting on Monday, February 6, 2023, at 5:00 p.m., in the Courtroom at the Brooks County Courthouse, located at 100 East Screven Street, Quitman, GA. Commissioners present were: Mr. Patrick Folsom, Chairman, Mr. James Maxwell, Vice Chairman; Ms. Myra Exum; Mr. Willie Cody; and Mr. Lee Larko. Others present were Mrs. Jessica McKinney, County Administrator; Ms. Patricia Williams, County Clerk – not present; Ms. Kim Daniels, Human Resources; Mr. Jason Kemp, County Attorney; and various residents.

1. PUBLIC HEARINGS – SIGN-IN SHEET

Prayer – Chairman asked Pastor Steve Sherling to lead all in attendance in prayer. Chairman stated the Pledge will be done during the monthly meeting.

County Attorney Jason Kemp explained the time allotment for the hearing.

Special Exception – Morven Solar, LLC – Sherry Davidson, Planner, Southern Georgia Regional Commission, presented the special exemption request by Morven Solar, LLC for a large-scale solar energy system in an Agricultural Zoned District consisting of 940.3 acres on a portion of 11 land parcels which includes five (5) landowners along Peach Road, Guess Road, Lawson Pond Road, and Valdosta Highway 133 east of Morven, GA. Planning Commission met January 19, 2023; during the meeting Pine Gate Renewables, the Applicant, presented their proposed application for a Large Scale Solar Energy System. Zoning Consultant made the recommendation for denial due to the inconsistency with the Comprehensive Plan, quantity of prime farmland that will be lost, the impact on wetlands and wildlife, and roads. Planning Commission vote was 3 to 1 for conditional approval.

Due to the staff's concern of the amount of "prime farmland", the quantity of jurisdictional wetlands, the threatened and candidate species potential impacts, and the amount of access roads due to the parcels not being contiguous (especially Peach Road – dirt), Staff recommended denial of the Special Exception request.

Ms. Davidson explained how recommendation was reached based on materials received explaining the following:

- How it affects adjoining real estate
- Hydrology
- Land Stewardship - Fence around area for animal control
- Wetlands protection and maintenance of property
- Radiation
- Health & Safety
- Road Maintenance Agreement from Attorney Nijem
- Taxes

Mrs. Exum inquired if all requirements/conditions were met, and the answer was yes.

Mr. Larko inquired if the road use agreement has been met. Attorney for the Applicant, Pine Gate Renewables, Mr. William Nijem, stated they would sit down with our attorney and commissioners once approval is made to discuss. Road use agreement was provided to County

Attorney for review. The Erosion and Sedimentation plan was not provided. Commissioner Larko argued that because this has not been fulfilled the motion is flawed. County Attorney explained the process to clarify.

Chairman asked for those in favor to speak.

Ms. Makayla Newsome, Project Manager, Pine Gate Renewables, presented the proposed application including drawings and documents.

Development Authority Executive Director, Stephanie Williams – gave mission statement and discussion regarding the Comprehensive Plan.

Roger Lawson - Spoke in favor, stating it would help the family secure the farm.

Makayla Martin, Robin Plymale, Lottie Chappel, Bryan Jake-Schoffman, all spoke in favor of the special exception.

Jerry Sapp – Resident on Lawson Pond Rd. and Peach Rd. – Spoke in favor stating he wants to keep growing and earn extra money.

William Nijem – Spoke in favor of the special exception.

Kayla Lawson McLeod – Commented she enjoys the farm, wants to see growth in the community, and be able to make money to help the farm and family's future.

Thomas Lockhart, Jess Merwin, Gavin Merwin, Sherry Sowards, Jackie McLeod, Ann Reagan, Terry Reagan, Chloe Sapp – All spoke in favor of the solar project.

Barbara Lawson, resident on Hitch St. in Morven, stated she loves the farm. This would mean future use and expansion for generations ahead and lengthen use of the farm with clean energy use.

Maylee McLeod, Becky Griffin, Frances Kelley, Maci Ott, Randy Merwin, Jim Baxter, Andrew Varrow, and Billie Joe Lovett, all were in favor of the special exception for Morven Solar Project.

Jerry Sapp, Jr. stated it would provide freedom to do what they want with their land and bring tax revenue.

Anna Sapp – In favor.

Howard Irvin Lawson – Commented it would be a safe alternative energy. Because farming is challenging and diversified.

Beth Lawson commented can do anything else with farm but lease a few acres for solar panels.

Drew Martin - Stated the need to diversify to make income with everything being up in price. Wants to be able to leave the farm to his son.

Stewart Chappel – There would be no job losses, but a huge financial boost for the County and stimulate the County to buy equipment and parts for farmers.

Libby Chappel – In favor.

Freddy Dell – Spoke in favor stating he is trying to hang onto the farm at mother's request to keep it in the family.

Nancy Dell, Dennis Plymale, Brandon Edmonson, Dale Rackly are all in favor.

Chairman called for those against the Special Exception to speak.

John Quarterman – Against it stating it contaminate water with herbicides.

Bill Brandon – Against it, stating there is Better use for property than metal and mirrors.

Blake McLeod – Against it, it goes against comprehensive plan.

Jeff Housier – Against it. Commented it would encroach on his freedom.

Matt Murphy – Have concerns with property value going down, don't want to see it.

Johnny & Pam Whiddon – Contaminates water in recharge area.

Chairman allotted Pine Gate Renewables to speak an additional 20 seconds.

MaKayla Newsome addressed a few issued mentioned previously.

Mrs. Exum asked Pine Gate to explain property assessments; and Pine Gate responded accordingly.

Mr. Larko inquired if they have received the questionnaire from Brooks County on negative impact of solar farms?

Wayne Waldron, Chief Tax Appraisal, reported there were no negative impact from solar projects. Have only had two sales with no impact.

The Chairman called a 5-minute recess at 7:01pm before going into the Monthly Meeting.

Chairman closed the public hearing at 7:06 pm to go into the regular meeting.

2. CALL TO ORDER

Prayer & Pledge of Allegiance – Chairman called the Regular Meeting to order. Attorney, Jason Kemp, led all in attendance in prayer and pledge of allegiance.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On the motion by Mr. Cody, seconded by Mr. Larko, the Board unanimously approved/accepted the following minutes:

- A. Regular Monthly Meeting January 9, 2023
- B. 2023 LMIG Work Session/Special Called Meeting January 24, 2023
- C. Executive Session January 24, 2023

4. **INVITED GUESTS - NONE**

5. **REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES & DEPARTMENTS – (5 MINUTES)**

Department Reports are in the packets.

6. **CONSENT AGENDA – NONE**

7. **OLD BUSINESS**

Enterprise Fleet Management – Mr. Jean R. Bordes presented the board options of replacing the County fleet. Mr. Bordes presented three proposals, discussing peeling the Sheriff's office off to have better control of the plan. They have assigned a local account team. He has created a one year budget to show savings. He also presented different ways to compensate strategies, used analysis to show comparison using scenarios with and without Sheriff's Department. Will discuss options with the Board and revisit at workshop requested by the Chairman on February 23, 2023.

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. Special Exception – Morven Solar, LLC. - The motion was made by Mrs. Exum to approve the application with the pending condition approvals met. If guidelines were not met, the recommendation was made to cease the operation. The Chairman called for a second once, twice, three times. Motion died for lack of a second. Chairman called for another motion. Mr. Maxwell made the motion to deny the application, Mr. Cody seconded. Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Cody, and Chairman voted yes. Mrs. Exum opposed. The vote was 3 to 1. Mr. Larko abstained stating he abstained due to his comment he made as a citizen during the Planning Commission Meeting. He did not want anyone to think his opinion influenced the Board of Commissioner's decision.

- A. **Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning** – Natalie Singletary, Brooks County Family Connections, Executive Director, presented a new grant, Community Transformation Grant (CTG), approved by the State. The purpose of the Grant is to support projects that increase access to early childhood services and resources. Mrs. Singletary is requesting the Board to serve as fiscal agent for the grant term which will begin January 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024.

Mr. Maxwell asked what happens to the funding once the grant expires. Natalie explained that the chances are favorable for receiving the grant again. Mr. Larko suggested putting flyers in the water bills in Pavo for marketing purposes.

The Board unanimously approved to serve as Fiscal Agent for the new grant, Community Transformation Grant (CTG) on the motion by Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Larko seconded.

B. **Equipment Purchase Approval** – During the work session, Board discussed purchasing equipment for the County mowing project. Mr. Vann was unable to attend with pricing. The Board tabled this item until the workshop on February 23rd.

9. **PUBLIC COMMENTS – (5 MINUTES)**

A. **Daniel Rowland – County Farm Lease on Old Madison Road (Fritzke Farm)**

Mr. Rowland requested to appear to explain the problem he is experiencing with hogs on the farm. Due to the lease not allowing hunting on the property, he wanted to inform the Board he is not hunting the hogs. He and his employees will trap them.

10. **COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES/COMMISSIONER NOTES – NONE**

- **Lee Larko (District 1)**
- **Patrick Folsom, Chairman (District 2)**
- **Willie Cody (District 3)**
- **Myra Exum (District 4)**
- **James Maxwell, Vice (District 5)**

11. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

12. **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Larko made the motion to adjourn at 8:15pm. Mr. Cody seconded.

Mr. Patrick Folsom, Chairman

Mrs. Jessica J. McKinney, County Administrator